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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Annual Report of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee 2024-2025



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Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

To consider and report on the following (and any additional matter added under Rule 6.1.5A)—

- (a) the practice and procedures of the Parliament in relation to its business;
- (b) whether a member's conduct is in accordance with these Rules and any Code of Conduct for members, matters relating to members interests, and any other matters relating to the conduct of members in carrying out their Parliamentary duties;
- (c) the adoption, amendment and application of any Code of Conduct for members;
- (d) matters relating to public appointments in Scotland;
- (e) matters relating to the regulation of lobbying; and
- (f) matters falling within the responsibility of the Minister for Parliamentary Business.

2. Where the Committee considers it appropriate, it may by motion recommend that a member's rights and privileges be withdrawn to such extent and for such period as are specified in the motion."



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Committee Membership



Convener
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Deputy Convener
Ruth Maguire
Scottish National Party



Emma Roddick
Scottish National Party



Sue Webber
Scottish Conservative
and Unionist Party



Annie Wells
Scottish Conservative
and Unionist Party

Introduction

1. This report covers the work of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee during the Parliamentary year between 13 May 2024 and 12 May 2025.

Membership changes

2. The following changes to the Committee's membership have been made during this parliamentary year:
 - Jackie Dunbar left the Committee on 17 June 2024 and was replaced by Joe FitzPatrick on 18 June 2024.
 - Ruth Maguire joined the Committee on 18 June 2024 (replacing Ivan McKee who left the Committee in the previous parliamentary year, on 8 May 2024).
 - Oliver Mundell left the Committee on 10 October 2024 and was replaced by Sue Webber.
 - Joe FitzPatrick left the Committee on 9 April 2025 and was replaced by Emma Roddick on 22 April 2025.

Meetings



Source: The Scottish Parliament

3. The Committee met 21 times during the parliamentary year. Four meetings were held entirely in private, 15 meetings included items in private and two meetings were held entirely in public. The purpose of the private items was for the Committee to consider a draft report, to agree its approach to a review of cross-party groups, to agree to seek authorisation to appoint a committee adviser and to agree its approach to inquiry.

Legislation



Bills scrutinised

Source: The Scottish Parliament

Scottish Elections (Representation and Reform) Bill

4. The Committee was designated lead committee for scrutiny of the Scottish Elections (Representation and Reform) Bill, which was introduced on 23 January 2024.
5. The Bill proposed changes to the law affecting Scottish Parliament and Scottish local government elections. The Committee published its Stage 1 report on 18 June 2024.
6. In advance of Stage 2, the Committee took further evidence on the Bill at its meetings on 5 September and 31 October 2024. The Committee considered the Bill at Stage 2 at its meetings on 7 and 14 November.

PE01949 Review the rules concerning Dual Mandate MSPs

7. Petition PE1949 was lodged on 12 July 2022 by Alexander James Dickson and called on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to review the rules regarding 'Dual Mandate MSPs', who whilst holding a seat in the Scottish Parliament also have a role in another local or national level of government and legislate to bring them in line with the Senedd and Stormont by preventing MSPs from holding a dual mandate, in time for the next Scottish Parliament elections.
8. The Committee considered this petition as part of its scrutiny of the Scottish Elections (Representation and Reform) Bill. Amendments were debated during Stage 2. At Stage 3 amendments were agreed to that provided for the prohibition of dual mandates to be made via subordinate legislation.

9. The Committee closed the petition on 16 January 2025 on the basis that the aims of the petition have been achieved through the Scottish Elections (Representation and Reform) Bill as passed.

Scottish Parliament (Recall and Removal of Members) Bill

10. The Committee was designated lead committee for scrutiny of the Scottish Parliament (Recall and Removal of Members) Bill, which was introduced by Graham Simpson MSP on 17 December 2024.
11. The Bill proposes that a Member could be recalled if they receive a sanction excluding them from Parliament for a certain period of time or receive a prison sentence of less than six months. It also proposes that a Member could be removed from their seat if they receive a prison sentence of 6 months to 1 year (at the moment an MSP is only removed if they receive a prison sentence of more than 1 year) or if they do not attend Parliament in person for 6 months and do not have a good reason for their non-attendance.
12. The Committee is currently considering the Bill at Stage 1 and has held one oral evidence session to date hearing from electoral administrators and regulatory bodies on 8 May 2025.
13. The Committee expects to continue taking evidence in May and June 2025 and to publish its report in autumn 2025.

Inquiries/Case Studies

Committee Effectiveness Inquiry

14. The Committee has been conducting its evidence gathering on its inquiry on committee effectiveness. It is seeking to answer the following question: “Are there changes to the Parliament’s procedures and practices which would help committees to work more effectively?”
15. The inquiry is exploring three key strands:
 - The current structure of committees, the best size of membership and the number of committees
 - Whether elected conveners would strengthen the committees of the Parliament and if so how
 - How committees currently evaluate their work and whether there are changes or improvements which could be made.
16. These key strands to the inquiry were agreed following an extended scoping process and then using a deliberative discussion to identify priority areas to explore with the support of an external advisor (Dr Danielle Beswick, University of Birmingham). Evidence planning and witness selection was informed by research carried out by Dr Beswick and SPICe.
17. The Committee has held further evidence sessions this parliamentary year capturing both practice and academic expertise on committee operation. It concluded its formal evidence taking with a session with political parties and the Minister for Parliamentary Business.
18. It has also received in response to written requests information from legislatures, political parties, Scottish Parliament committees and MSPs, who were provided with the option to provide their submission anonymously. The Committee has also had responses to its open call for views from regular committee stakeholders and a short public survey.
19. The Committee is due to hold a committee Chamber Debate late in May and then deliberate on the full body of evidence gathered prior to a report being considered in September.

‘A Parliament for All’: Report of the Parliament’s Gender Sensitive Audit

20. The Committee has continued to scrutinise and assess whether and how the recommendations in the report of the Parliament’s Gender Sensitive Audit “A Parliament for All” can be implemented.
21. The Audit sets out a suite of proposals relating to quotas for committee

membership. As a Committee we have agreed that as a minimum, there should be no single sex committees. We intend to propose this change take effect from the start of the next parliamentary session. We will bring forward this proposal for Parliament's consideration following conclusion of our Committee Effectiveness Inquiry. The inquiry is providing the Committee with an opportunity to consider further the Audit's other proposals for quotas for committee membership and convenerships further.

22. The Committee has also consulted the Presiding Officer, the Parliamentary Bureau and political parties on specific changes following consideration of the Audit which relate to Standing Orders regarding:
 - Parliamentary Bureau Membership
 - Election of Presiding Officer/Deputy Presiding Officer
 - Membership of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body.
23. Once the consultation responses have been received the Committee will consider them and decide on its next steps.

Consent in relation to UK Parliament Bills

24. The Committee concluded its work on consideration of the Standing Order procedures on consent in relation to UK Parliament Bills. It published a report that proposed a new rule to allow for motions refusing legislative consent. The new rule is a similar rule for motions refusing consent as currently exists for consent motions.
25. The Parliament agreed the proposed rule changes to Standing Orders and they took effect from 2 July 2024.

Cross-Party Groups



Source: The Scottish Parliament

26. In this reporting year, the Committee accorded recognition to Cross-Party Groups on:
 - Brain Tumours
 - Scottish Games Ecosystems
 - France.
27. In January and February 2025, the Committee consider Cross-Party Groups' compliance with the rules set out in Section 6 of the Code of Conduct. The Committee was concerned about the rate of non-compliance and agreed to withdraw recognition from a number of Groups that had failed to meet the requirements of the Code, particularly in relation to annual reporting requirements.
28. There are currently 104 recognised Cross-Party Groups, compared to 119 in the previous reporting year. The Committee will shortly commence a review of some of the rules relating to Cross-Party Groups with a view to making changes to aid future compliance with the Code of Conduct.

Parliamentary Corporation Supported Bodies

29. Under the Parliament's Standing Orders, the annual reports or strategic plans of supported bodies are to be referred to the Committee within whose remit the subject matter of that document falls for consideration.
30. The Committee took evidence from the Ian Bruce, Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland on his annual report on 14 March 2024.
31. The Committee took evidence from David Hamilton, the new Scottish Information Commissioner on his annual report on 22 February 2024.

Equal opportunities

32. The Committee has taken considerations relating to equal opportunities into account throughout a number of aspects of its work. As noted earlier in this report, the Committee has agreed that, as a minimum, there should be no single-sex committees in Session 7 and will propose changes to Standing Orders to the Parliament in due course.
33. The Committee is also taking equal opportunities into consideration during its scrutiny of the Scottish Parliament (Recall and Removal of Members) Bill, particularly in relation to the proposals in that Bill regarding removal for non-attendance and whether this proposal may have a greater impact on Members with certain protected characteristics or who have caring responsibilities.

